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TAGS: IZ PGOV PREL PINR  
SUBJECT: SADRISTS, ISCI SCORE KEY KARBALA COMMITTEE CHAIRS

REF: BAGHDAD 1014

Classified By: Deputy Polcouns John G. Fox, reasons 1.4 b/d.

This is a PRT Karbala Reporting Cable

¶1. (C) Summary: In a surprising development, Karbala's Da'wa-dominated Provincial Council (PC) has assigned followers of Muqtada al-Sadr and members of the Islamic Supreme Council of Iraqi (ISCI) to chair several key committees. This reduces the potential risks of Da'wa one-party rule in Karbala and may improve security by making ISCI and the Sadrists more inclined to work within the political process. However, these committee assignments may make PRT relations with the new PC more difficult, notably with the Security Committee. The Sadrists and ISCI appear to be following a familiar Middle Eastern pattern in which Islamist parties seek social service assignments to win public trust and distribute patronage. Conversely, Da'wa may have given the Sadrists and ISCI high-profile assignments to gain political mileage from their expected inability to satisfy public expectations of rapidly improving public services. End Summary.

Sadrists, ISCI Gain Voices

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¶2. (SBU) A reliable contact provided the PRT on April 23 with a breakdown of the just-completed committee assignments within Karbala's Da'wa-dominated PC. Surprisingly, Sadrists and members of ISCI scored key chairs. Sadrists will be in charge of the Economy, Transportation and Communications, and Water and Sewage Committees. ISCI bagged the Immigration, Health, and Security Committees.

¶3. (C) With these assignments, ISCI and the Sadrists -- both of which previously had expressed unhappiness at the prospect of being shut out of decision-making here -- will have important voices and thus likely will be more inclined to work within the political process rather than take their differences into the streets, a welcome development for political stability in Karbala. Moreover, Da'wa can point to these assignments in allaying the concerns expressed by some here over the prospect of one-party Da'wa rule in the province.

U.S. Interests May Suffer

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¶4. (C) On the negative side of the ledger, the committees now chaired by Sadrists and ISCI members are among those with which the USG and PRT have important work to do. The PRT is heavily involved in efforts to build Karbala's economy, improve its infrastructure, and boost its ability to provide clean water and functional sewage services to its citizens.

¶5. (C) ISCI's control of the security portfolio looms as the most worrisome development. The newly named chairman, Hamad Sahib Mohammad, is known to play a leadership role in the Badr Corps here and has refused to meet with the PRT. Also troubling is that the new chairman of the Health Committee, Hezbollah-linked Dr. Hamid Hamza al-Turfi, was detained in February by Iraqi forces (supported by U.S. elements). He was released, but not before ISCI flooded the local media with claims that he had been kidnapped by U.S. forces.

Comment: What is Da'wa's Strategy?

¶6. (C) We are unlikely to know Da'wa's strategy behind making these assignments until we have the chance to question Governor Amal al-Din al-Hir and other leaders directly. In part, the surprising committee assignments might have been dictated by the fact that many Da'wa party members on the PC lack technocratic skills. Another possibility is the "give-them-enough-rope-to-hang-themselves<sup>8</sup> maneuver.

Recalling public unhappiness over the poor performance of the previous "do-nothing" PC, Da'wa may have given the Sadrists and ISCI high-profile assignments to gain political mileage from their expected inability to satisfy public expectations of rapidly improving public services. End Comment.

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